

odious to his lay advocates by accusing him of doctrines subversive of State as well as Church. He was charged with declaring that the * Saints are in actual possession of all things.' It was on this speculative basis that he had, in his earlier works, propounded a theory of communism, but he had always qualified it by admitting that it was impracticable, and had since let it drop as he became more engrossed by Church reform.¹

Such were the opinions for which he was arraigned by the Pope, and which he maintained during several months of controversy. The government and people of England were both on his side. He was never in his life so strong as he was in this year, when he stood as the national champion against the Papacy, and spoke the national feeling against the abuses of the Church at home. Men had not had time to see how far he was leading them, and were content with the general direction. In later years, when he expounded one by one the doctrines peculiar to later Protestantism, he formed a powerful sect, but he ceased to lead the nation or to enjoy the patronage of the government. The story of his year of triumph is quickly told. The bulls ordering his arrest arrived about the time of Edward's death. The early months of Richard's reign were not a time for further troubling the waters, and it is probable that the unsettled state of the kingdom and the danger of invasion were causes why the Bishops refrained from acting on their orders when first received. But they soon had still better reasons for postponing action. The Commons who met in October 1377 to renew the policy of the Good Parliament, were furiously anti-papal. As the House was in this temper, Wycliffe appeared in person and presented to the members a defence of his heresies so technical, that it must have puzzled any honest knight of the shire who tried to understand it.² The Bishops still maintained a masterly inactivity. They did well to hesitate before beginning the prosecution, for the governors of the kingdom, as well as the Commons, were on Wycliffe's side. The disasters and difficulties of the year had brought prominently before all the

¹ Wals., i. 353-5. For Wycliffe's communism, see below, chap. vi. » *Fasc. Z.** 245.